Trope: Flower Shop AU (CharJo)

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Trope: Flower Shop AU (CharJo)

by TigerPrawn

Summary

An omegan doctor who strives against convention. An alpha who loves flower arranging. Secrets, revelations and a historical market place.

First Saturday

Johann looked up from his desk. His last patient of the day had no sooner gone than his secretary was stood in front of him with a hopeful smile.

“Please!” Caroline begged. “Just this month. We had someone all lined up to take over when our previous first aider retired, but they’re not available until next month now. We can’t open the market without an onsite first aiders.”

“Caroline, I’m a doctor.” Johann replied coolly as he pushed back a strand of his hair that had fallen loose from his ponytail. An old fashioned style for an omega, but he preferred it.

“Yes! A very good one, more than adequate for our needs.” She flattered, at which he had to roll his eyes.

“Just this month.” He agreed. She clapped excitedly and let herself back out of his office before giving him a chance to change his mind.

It would just have to be this month in any case, because his heat was due by the following month. His plans for that period of time were firmly focused on a knotting dildo in the privacy of his own home.

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“You know this is weird, right?” Ella asked, picking up some flowers from the rustic looking cart, inspecting them with disdain.

Char slapped her hand away and scowled as he continued to set out the flowers. “You’re my bodyguard. You’re here to guard my body, not judge me.”

“All I’m saying is that you could be doing anything you want!” She insisted, and not for the first time. He knew she was always bored when he did this, but it *was* what he wanted to do.

Char raised a brow and gave a long suffering look.

“I mean. Char, you’re literally a prince. Sure, it’s some obscure country no one has ever heard of and you’ve barely been back since your parents shipped you here for boarding school a decade ago, but-” She stopped for a moment to return his annoyed look. “I’m just saying, it’s weird that you like to come to spend your weekends at these wanna be renaissance fayre events, posing as a florist.”

He gave her a withering look. “Posing? Ella, I’m a grad student about to get my Master in Botany.” He huffed and she rolled her eyes. “It hurts me that you have such a lack of appreciation for the history behind all this. Don’t you know how rare these are? This species for one, is only available through a specialist grower and has barely changed in three hundred years.” He pointed at the blooms in front of her.

Ella shook her head, “You’re such a nerd.”

“It’s a wonder we’re friends.” Char growled.

“Oh, we’re not.” Ella grinned. “I’m your bodyguard, remember?” She teased.

Char rolled his eyes again, “If you’re not going to help me set up, then sit down. The market opens in two minutes.”

He ignored her as she took a seat, muttering something about how it was weird to have an alpha so interested in flowers. He shook his head, her good natured taunting was just that. She was pretty much the annoying sister he had never wanted. But his parents had insisted he have a bodyguard if he planned to live incognito in a foreign country. And it was a small price to pay.

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When Saturday came around, it wasn’t as bad as Johann thought it might be.

He had never been to the fayre despite the amount of times his secretary, Caroline had mentioned it. Which had been frequently given that her husband was the owner of the marketplace. It functioned as a normal market the rest of the week but on Saturdays was given over to this ye olde fayre that seemed one of the most popular draws of the small historical town he’d settled in.

It just wasn’t exactly the sort of place he enjoyed and he wasn’t obtuse enough not to understand why.

As an omega he’d had to work twice as hard to become a doctor than a single one of the alphas in his classes. And whilst he now had the successful practice he had earned, it had been an arduous journey. He had frequently been told by teachers and students alike that he wouldn’t get anywhere, that he should just give up and do omegan things like nursing or

baking. Of course, it had mostly been their jealousy over how well he was doing, but it still had stung.

The thought of spending a day shopping, as omegas were assumed to adore, much less in a historical market where he could buy quilts and other comfortable homewares, was not fun. As it was, on this day he had chosen to wear something that would clearly denote him as a doctor, so as not to allow anyone to assume for one moment that he was in fact there shopping.

“Oh, very nice!” Caroline said as he wandered into her husband’s office. “A nice touch!”

She tapped the authentic medical bag he had purchased, containing all his very modern first aid items. He had stopped short of a white coat, given that the market was outdoors, and though summer was reaching an end, it was still very warm. He had, however, gone for some historical garb and a historical stethoscope that he’d purchased from the same shop as the bag.

Perhaps unnecessary expenses for a short term involvement. But if he was honest, it felt like armour or a shield against the misconception of an unmated omega of his age being at such a frivolous event.

Johann cleared his throat. “Yes, perhaps when the new first aider starts, they might like to purchase them from me. At a reasonable price of course.”

“Of course.” Caroline agreed with a smile. But a moment later she frowned and let out a sigh. “You’re so tense. This is actually meant to be fun you know? The stalls and carts are all setting up now but the market doesn’t open for another few minutes. Why don’t you have a wander and settle in?”

She smiled but started shooing him out of the door nonetheless.

He huffed as he found himself back out in the marketplace, already busy with the activity of setting up. He did as Caroline had suggested and began to wander, though not to browse. He made clear strides around the stalls, looking for anything that might prove hazardous. It of course wasn’t his job or responsibility, but if he was to be the on site first aider, trying to prevent accidents would be to his benefit as much as anyone’s.

His erstwhile inspection took very little time and he could see that the gates of the marketplace were being opened. Johann let out a sigh, wondering if he could just spend the day in the office catching up on some medical journals he’d yet to find time to read. He felt a blush touch his cheeks at the thought of any of his patients seeing him here when he worked so hard to have them not see him as an omega.

He was about to head back towards the office when something caught his eye.

A beautifully appointed and abundantly decorated old cart was full of the most spectacular flowers he’d ever seen. And one in particular had caught his eye. He didn’t even realise he’d come to a stop in front of the cart, his attention focused, when a young woman spoke from behind it.

“Can I help?”

“Valerian.” Johann replied, remembering his days at medical school. A loner as he was, he had a few hobbies, and one of them had been an interest in historical medicinal plants and herbs.

“It’s Ella, actually.” The young woman chuckled and at that he looked up at her with a confused frown.

Johann was about to answer when a young man suddenly appeared next to her, heaving a box from the floor and placing it out of sight behind the blooms on the cart.

“He means the flowers,” The young alpha growled at the girl, his exasperation clear. She just chuckled and waved off the response before moving away from the cart and taking a seat on the bench a little further behind it.

“Can I help you?” The alpha asked, turning to Johann now with a friendly smile.

Johann couldn’t help his moment of stunned silence. The boy was likely ten years his junior, but Johann had never seen such a beautiful alpha before. Never before had seen one that made his heart flutter ever so slightly. He might have had his share of flings at college and medical school, but none had even remotely piqued his interest. But this alpha, he was breathtaking.

Johann closed his eyes and drew a breath, releasing it as an aggravated sigh at the thought of how his oncoming heat was already addling his mind like some hormonal infant.

“Are you alright?” The young man asked, to which Johann opened his eyes and nodded.

“I’m surprised to see Valeria. It’s not native.” Johann replied quickly.

The young man laughed, “No, it really isn’t. I have a specialist supplier. It’s pretty to bulk out a bouquet, but actually throughout history valerian root has been used for its medicinal-”

“I’m aware,” Johann interjected with a fond smile, which the boy returned as he pointed to the stethoscope around his neck.

The alpha chuckled, “Not just for show, then?”

Johann shook his head. “No, I’m Johann Struensee, I run the local General Practice, and for today, I am a doctor out of time.”

The young man smiled and reached across the flowers to offer his hand, “Char.” He replied, “Nice to meet you.”

When their palms met Johann found his breath catching, certain that he didn’t imagine the pulse of *something* between them. Perhaps Char felt it too because, despite their hands grasping a little too long, the alpha suddenly pulled back.

He muttered, “Um, did you want me to make up a bouquet then? Or are you wanting to acquire some root for your practice?” The alpha teased.

Char grinned then and Johann couldn’t help but return it.

“I’m not really in the market for either. But, I shall keep it in mind should I run low on my usual prescriptions.” Johann replied with a soft chuckle, a hint of a purr.

The flirtation was completely unexpected and unplanned. He hadn’t meant his tone to come out like that but he couldn’t hate that it did, given the fond gaze the alpha had locked on him.

“As you’re a doctor, I’ll cut you a special deal.” Char smiled, warmly.

Johann chuckled and nodded, “I’ll hold you to that.” And then he wandered away before he could say anything more foolish.

Second Saturday

“Oh doctor!” Char called out and Johann turned towards his cart as Char signalled him over eagerly.

In truth, he’d been heading that way already, but he hadn’t wanted to be obvious. Instead making his way slowly through the stalls that were all unpacking. Making sure there were no hazards, or so he’d say if asked. And if he ended up at the flower cart, what of it?

Last Saturday at the end of the day, he had returned to Char’s cart as he’d been packing up, and they had talked a little more about medicinal flowers.

Char had once again offered him a special deal on a bouquet which would feature the valeria but Johann had chuckled and had to admit that despite his skill with patients, he failed miserably at keeping either cut flowers or living plants alive. So far his only success had been a window box in his apartment full of rampant chives that seemed to grow incessantly no matter how much he harvested to use in his meals.

The alpha’s laughter had been something warm and full. It had made Johann *feel* warm and full, and it had made him tingle all over.

They had talked a while longer, not even noticing that his friend Ella had been packing up around them the whole time, and then the place was almost empty. They were one of the few stalls left packing up and as much as he wanted to continue talking, Johann had pulled himself away.

Now, he walked towards the flower cart with a friendly smile, trying not to let the eager spring in his step show.

“I was thinking,” Char said as Johann drew near.

“Yes?” Johann smiled, his heart jumping into his throat as he waited with anticipation of what the alpha might suggest.

He wouldn't have necessarily called their previous chat flirtatious. But it wasn't not flirtatious either. It was friendly and jovial, with an underlying current of desire he was sure he hadn't imagined.

So, what was Char thinking? Johann sucked in a breath and felt his palms grow clammy.

"Prickly pear." Char grinned.

"Excuse me?" Johann asked, unsure and a little deflated.

"You said you can't keep plants and flowers alive, well it got me thinking. I could probably get you some prickly pear. Not sure about growing it in a window box though." Char was grinning, leaning over the cart so his elbow rested on the wood and his chin rested on his hand, gazing at Johann in a way that made his heart skip.

"Prickly pear? Cactus?" Johann asked, trying to get on the same page.

"Cacti are great for people who otherwise kill mother nature. They're pretty resilient." Char continued to grin and Johann couldn't help but smile back. "And they're medicinal." The alpha added.

"Ah, lovely. So I could then also treat my patients with the fruit of my green thumb." Johann joked.

Char chuckled and shook his head, moving back a little. "Great for type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and hangovers."

Johann followed Char's movement, his eyes drawn to the alpha's beautiful neck, and the deep V of the peasant-like shirt he was wearing today. When his eyes reached Char's face he realised he was being appraised in the same way.

Char's eyes lingered on his own neck, where a historical sort of tie kept his collar drawn together.

When Char's eyes finally met his, the alpha blushed and looked away. Caught out.

Johann was about to say something, though he had no idea what, when Ella appeared. Char's friend, or employee - he wasn't quite sure which - smiled at him and gave him a friendly nod as she set a box on the end of the cart.

"I should leave you to it." Johann said, giving them both a smile and a nod before he turned and carried on through the market.

Perhaps he should muster the courage to just throw caution to the wind and give the alpha his business card? The worst that could happen was the Char wouldn't call and after Johann finished helping out for Caroline, they'd never see each other again.

That thought left a sour feeling in his gut.

Third Saturday

“Charmont!” Ella appeared behind him and gave his arm a gentle punch. “Was that the doctor again?” She grinned and Char could feel the blush rising on his cheeks.

The new on site first aider was an attractive and apparently eligible omegan doctor. A man of high standing and respect. Just the sort of person his parents would love, and so of course, Ella would mock him mercilessly over their continued flirtation.

At least, he thought it was a flirtation. After all, the doctor never bought anything and Char was never in need of first aid, so what other reason was there for the omega to linger and chat?

And it wasn’t the brash flirtation of many his own age. Especially those who knew he allowed to know more about himself and then wanted to win favour. It was honest and sweet. Good natured. And Char found himself enjoying that, even if Ella would tease him for it.

“Want me to fire you?” He growled through his teeth. At which Ella laughed and waved her hand dismissively.

“I’m employed by your parents, not you. Good luck explaining to them why you want a new bodyguard.” She leaned in and gave him a peck on his cheek, knowing it would both annoy him and leave him with no retort. “And-” She continued but then, despite her chuckling, she stopped short and went quiet, before clearing her throat.

Char frowned and then looked back over the cart to see what had stopped her.

Johann stood there, a business card in hand and a stunned look on his face.

“Oh, I apologise, I didn’t mean to intrude.” The doctor blinked and then turned on his heel and left.

“What was that about?” Char asked, feeling a pull within him to chase after the omega, but put that down to hindbrain instincts. Despite their costumes, this wasn’t the middle ages.

“Char!” Ella exclaimed and slapped his shoulder. “He was going to give you his number.”

“What?” Char replied with an uncomfortable chuckle.

“That’s a surprise to you?” She frowned.

“No, I… I mean yes.” Char started, “Sort of.” He winced.

“You like him. Go after him!” Ella gestured towards the retreating omega.

Char shook his head, a lump in his throat as he tried to hide his emotions. “No, it’s not like that. I don’t like him like that.” He lied.

“Oh, no. No, no. Char! No!” Ella grabbed him by the shoulders and looked at him intently, wearing a stern expression. “You always do this!”

“Always do-? Ella I’ve never even, and then there was… Um…” He struggled for words as she rolled her eyes.

“You’re always scared they know who you are. Or if they don’t, that when they find out, it will make a difference and you’ll never know if they like you for you, or because you’re secretly a prince.”

He glared at her and looked quickly around to see if anyone was close enough to hear. Which of course they weren’t, because she’d never be so reckless as that.

“Look,” She growled at him, “I’m your bodyguard, and I’m your friend. But what I’m not is your beard. I’m not here for you to hide behind when you want to scare people off.”

She let go of his shoulders and then dropped onto the bench behind their cart, folding her arms and scowling at him. “You’re a shit sometimes, you know that?”

Char felt his cheeks burn at the truth in her words.

He liked the doctor, he really did. But Ella was right. Not just in how he treated people, but the reasons why. And he wasn’t sure that was ever going to change.

No matter how he felt about it.

Char looked down at the valeria and let out a heavy sigh.

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“Are you alright?” Caroline asked as Johann let himself into the market office and took a seat.

He could feel how flushed he was, anger and humiliation running through him. How foolish to think that the flirtatious young alpha had any real interest. He had been a fool to act as any common omega would and not a man of his standing. His behaviour had been beneath his usual comportment.

“It’s nothing.” Johann waved Caroline off and tried to smile, though it barely reached his lips, much less his eyes.

“It’s Char.” She said.

He looked up sharply and she gave him a fond smile and took a seat.

“I know you well enough to know there is a reason other than flowers that keeps you visiting his cart. And I can’t imagine it’s Ella. Though I’m not sure your preference when it comes to betas, I am at least sure that you prefer the company of men.”

“Caroline,” Johann began to growl, uncomfortable at the personal turn this had taken.

She shook her head. “Don’t worry, it’s not so obvious to anyone else. You do a good job of making visits to other stalls to be friendly. All the ones run by wizened old omegas, rather

than handsome young alphas of course."

"This is embarrassing." Johann groaned and dropped his head to his hand, covering his eyes. "A ridiculous infatuation."

"What's ridiculous about it?" Caroline scalded. "He's clearly interested-"

"He can't be." Johann interjected. "Ella…"

"Ella?" Caroline started and then her eyes went wide. "Ella and Char? No, I don't think that's right…" She frowned, thinking it over.

"They seemed very… friendly, when I just saw them."

"No, I don't believe… No." Caroline shook her head. "I'll grant their close. At first I thought they might be brother and sister. I think they've just been friends for a very long time."

Johann let out a heavy sigh and shook his head.

"It doesn't matter. I have no desire to humiliate myself further." Johann stood abruptly and straightened his shirt.

"Johann," Caroline protested, but he didn't stop. He walked out the door and began his walk around the market once more, avoiding the flower cart each time.

Final Saturday

Johann groaned and pulled himself from his bed.

It was the final Saturday he had agreed to work at the market and he couldn't be more grateful.

His annual heat was so close he could feel it itching under his skin. He wouldn't be surprised if it arrived slightly early, before the end of the coming week.

On Friday he'd already had Caroline move all of his appointments, and brought forward his leave just in case. By Wednesday he was sure to be in the first throes of heat and in no fit state to continue his practice for the week.

Johann showered, the water feeling harsh on his skin. The horrible flu like symptoms of pre-heat setting in. Perhaps it would be Tuesday rather than Wednesday after all, he mused with a sigh.

Johann dressed in a light shirt, leaving the throat untied this time, and forgoing the rather fine historically authentic jacket he'd acquired, for the sake of comfort. He took some time to apply scent blockers too. He rarely used them, but with the scent of his pre-heat rising, it was best he dampen it to a barely traceable odour, to get through the day.

He really didn't want to do this, but knew that not turning up would mean the market having to close for the day unless they could find someone else to stand in as a first aider. So far he'd

only had to deal with a few skinned knees from kids running around and one incident where a rather large ham somehow ended up falling off the butcher's cart and onto someone's foot. And in that case there had been an obvious break so he'd sent them to the hospital. These were all things, Johann was sure, that someone else could handle perfectly adequately.

But now time was too short to pull out.

And it wasn't just the horrible feeling of pre-heat, it was also the heavy melancholy feeling that accompanied it. Never before in his life had he felt like this.

Beyond a few times where he'd used a heat clinic when in medical school, Johann had never shared his heat with anyone, much less an alpha. He'd never felt the need to. He was able to manage perfectly well by himself, and even when he'd had partners in the past, it had never felt like they were in a place where he'd want to share his heat with them.

And yet, his mind kept going to Char. The alpha, as beautiful and charming as his name suggested. Johann was unable to deny the want and need he felt. One that he should never have acted on, even if there had been some sort of happy conclusion to their flirting. Much less now, when it was clear that Char wouldn't be interested.

As Johann made his way to the market, his mind reeled through scenarios where the alpha sought him out and requested his card. Where he called and they went on a date.

It was a pointless torture.

"Johann, oh my word!" Caroline exclaimed. He looked up at her familiar voice, to see her standing by the office door. "You look terrible." She said this a little quieter as she ushered him inside.

"I knew you were needing leave soon, but… Are you sure you should be here?" Her concern was palpable.

"It's fine," He pulled on as much of a smile as he could. "It's just pre-heat, usually lasts up to three days. I'm not concerned."

Caroline eyed him, an expression that told of how concerned she was. "Far be it from me to counter a doctor's opinion, but I've never seen you look like this before. You look… Johann, you look like you're about to go into heat at any moment."

He was glad that he and his secretary were friendly enough to talk of such things, or he might have been mortified with guilt over the rising blush in her cheeks.

"I-I think you should go home."

Johann shook his head and frowned. "I'm fine, I assure you. Besides, I said I would be here and I intend to keep my promise. I can last out the day."

Caroline shook her head and mumbled under her breath. Finally she huffed and looked back to him, frowning as she replied, "Fine. But, you stay in here. If someone needs first aid, then

you can maybe come out. We'll see. But this… Johann this is reckless and I really don't think you're in your right mind."

Johann frowned at the implication that he was a feeble minded omega, unable to make decisions now he was on the cusp of heat.

"I am a medical doctor, I know my own mind." He growled and she let out another heavy sigh. But even so, when she stuck out her hand to shake on it, he did so.

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Char sighed.

He had to admit that he had been counting down the days to the next market. And not just because he wanted to relax after a long week at school, but also to see Johann again.

But it was pointless. Ella was right. He enjoyed Johann's company and the more he did then the more he'd, inevitably, push Johann away.

"Oh wow, you're really going to be like this all day, aren't you." Ella said as she returned to the cart with two cups of coffee and passed one to him.

He shook his head, "I don't know. I just feel like… You're right. I know you're right. I'll only push Johann away so it's best not to get close. But I just feel bad. Am I the reason he's not here today? I thought he was working this whole month?"

Ella narrowed her eyes at him as she sipped her coffee. When she drew back she let out a huff and set her cup down on the side of the stall.

"Firstly, I never said you should stay away from him. Hell, I want you to go for him. I want you to actually be interested in someone and *not* push them away! And secondly, he is here."

"What? Where?" Char asked.

"I thought you said there was no point as you'd push him away." Ella challenged, her expression making it clear she was so fed up with this bullshit. When Char simply glared at her in response, she sighed and pointed at the office.

"I noticed he's in the manager's office. Looks like he's not doing his rounds today."

"Damn," Char cursed under his breath and his jaw tightened. Had he done that? Made Johann feel like he shouldn't roam around the market place as he had been doing?

The thought made Char feel a little sick.

"I'm going to go talk to him," Char said, moving around the cart.

"And say what?" Ella pressed, "If you are just going to mess him around and push him away, then don't be an asshole and start pulling him close."

Char stopped at her words, both stunned and stung. At his hurt expression she sighed and shook her head.

“Char, I love you like family. I will literally lay down my life for you… mostly because I’m paid a hefty sum to do so. But sometimes you can be your own worst enemy. I’ve watched you with this man the last couple of weeks. Talking and laughing in a way I’ve *never* seen you interact with omegas you’ve met at school or at a bar. You two genuinely connect, and if there’s someone you should finally let close, it’s someone you connect with.”

“I want to…” Char admitted, struggling to get the words out.

“I know you do, hun.” Ella gave him a soft smile. “Just don’t walk over there, reassure yourself he’s okay, only to ditch him.”

“I just,” Char shook his head. “It’s so much. What if I tell him and it’s too much for him and he rejects me? What if I tell him and he goes and sells me out? I have a life here, I love it here. If he sells my story then I lose my anonymity and I might as well go home and play the dutiful Prince.”

Ella shrugged, “Those things might happen. Sometimes it’s just worth the chance. Is he worth the chance?”

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Johann closed his eyes to the sound of the door opening, the squeal of the hinges that needed to be oiled.

“Caroline isn’t here,” He said, before opening his eyes and seeing Char stood before him. He had closed the door quietly behind him, and now stood rubbing at the back of his neck with one hand and offering a small bouquet with the other as a blush rose on his cheeks.

“I came to talk with you actually.” Char replied and then swallowed.

“Alright,” Johann replied, trying very hard to hold himself together.

Perhaps Caroline was right. His shirt stuck to the sweat on his back, and he was feeling so achy. No longer quite fluey, no. It was that dull ache of feeling empty and in need of a knot.

As much as he wanted to ignore it, Johann couldn’t deny, he was clearly on the very verge of going into heat.

“I’m going to cut to the chase,” Char said, looking down at his feet and looking bashful yet every inch the alpha. “I like you. I enjoy your company and-”

“What about Ella?” The words were out before Johann could stop them, or the slight growl that came with them.

At that Char looked up, wide-eyed and shook his head.

“She’s a friend. Just a friend. We’ve known each other for years and…” Char trailed off and looked defeated. “There’s something I need to tell you. About me and…”

Char let out a heavy sigh and pulled up the seat opposite Johann, sitting down and clasping his hands in front of him.

Johann bit back a whine at how close the alpha was, the wonderful scent of him. A scent he wanted to luxuriate in and rub all over his own body.

“I- I have money. Um, my family is rich and, um, well known.” Char started, seemingly trying to avoid words. So only a half truth then? Only as much as he wanted Johann to know.

“Why are you telling me this?” Johann asked, clearly the alpha was doing so reluctantly.

“Because I like you. I should have taken your card. I should have called you.” He reached across and took Johann’s hands in his own so suddenly that the omega almost reeled back. The flinch was enough for Char to let go.

“I just wanted to tell you that. But perhaps I’ve misread things. And-”

“No, no.” Johann protested. “I… enjoy your company immensely.” He forced out the words, feeling breathless. From his oncoming heat or the presence of the alpha? He couldn’t say.

Silence fell between them before Char seemed to relax a little and placed the flowers on the table next to Johann.

“In the past some people have only been interested in me because of who or what I am, when they find out and… I don’t think you’re like that.” Char said quietly as though trying to decide whether to impart more. Finally the alpha let out a sigh and continued, “Do you know Lamia? The country?”

“Of course, a small kingdom in-” Johann stopped when he saw how Char grit his teeth and nodded.

“My parents, they... I... “ Char started. “I hope you’ll reveal this to no-one. My identity here is secret and I have been allowed to live out my adolescence and education as any alpha might. But one day I’ll have to return and I’ll stop being Char, the botany student who likes historical flowers and runs a flower cart. I’ll be Prince Charmont, heir to the throne of Lamia.”

Johann blinked, trying to take in everything that Char was saying. But it was so difficult, his head was starting to swim. His body feeling unbelievably hot and achy. And then he felt it, the slick starting to swell.

“I wanted you to know. But I understand if that means you’d rather not continue this discussion. If it’s too much. I just hoped you were someone who might like me for me. The real me, not the crown that will sit upon my head one day.”

Johann swallowed, unable to speak, but looking at Char with a fondness. He was so glad the alpha had told him, but this was fast becoming neither the time or the place.

“Char,” Johann breathed out the alpha’s name, about to try and explain that perhaps he did in fact need to go home. But apparently the signals he didn’t know he was giving off, were enough to make Char act. He closed the space between them and pressed a chaste kiss to Johann’s lips.

When the alpha drew back, Johann let out a shuddering breath.

Char smiled, “Perhaps you could give me your card now?” He asked hopefully.

With a whimper, Johann stood and took a step to Char, sinking down onto the floor in front of him and starting to unbuckle his pants. He was overcome with a need, a desire. Not just relief from his now descending heat, but specifically from Char. This alpha that had just bared so much of himself.

“What are you doing!” Char pushed back, shocked. He was on his feet immediately, looking down at Johann with hurt and disgust. He scented the air and could smell it then, Johann’s ill-timed arousal. “I thought… you didn’t seem like someone who would move so fast and now.”

Char shook his head, his face thunderous, and yet he held his emotions in.

“Is it the crown or the wealth that has made you so wet?” Char growled, his words breaking with emotion. Before Johann could even attempt to string words together, Char held up his hand. “I don’t want to know. I… I don’t want to know you at all.”

Char turned on his heel and strode from the office, slamming the door closed behind him.

*

“What on earth!” Caroline’s startled words pulled Char from his thoughts and he realised he’d been barrelling so fast back to the flower cart that he’d almost knocked the woman off her feet.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t…” Char tried to get out the words but they choked off. He should never have listened to Ella.

“Are you alright?” Caroline asked, placing a gentle hand on his arm and looking back to see where he’d come from. “Were you in the office?”

“The doctor isn’t as above reproach as his demeanor suggests.” Char growled out the words, not wanting to aim them at her, but his emotions were still so raw.

“Johann? What did he… Oh no. Is he…” Caroline’s eyes flicked back to the office and then she took off at a run.

“What?” Char called after her, “What is it?” And then he too ran. Heart in throat he caught up with her as she opened the office door, still bewildered but consumed with concern.

“Johann!” Caroline called out and was immediately on the floor, kneeling next to the doctor who was now curled on his side and shaking. “Dammit. Why wouldn’t you listen.” She

looked around and saw that Char had followed her and pointed at the phone. “Can you call the operator? Get put through to the local heat clinic, we-”

“No,” Johann’s protest came out as a whimper. “No clinic. Want to go h-home.”

“What’s happening?” Char asked, looking between the pair and fearing something really terrible was going on.

“His heat. It isn’t due for a few more days but then suddenly he was in pre-heat and now…” She gestured at the prone omega. “This isn’t good. I don’t even know if he’s prepared his apartment yet.”

Johann nodded, “Home.” He reiterated, wincing in pain as he clutched at his stomach.

“I didn’t know,” Char said, numb, shaking his head. “He doesn’t… there’s no scent…”

“Blockers,” Caroline replied, screwing up her nose and clearly a lot more adept at scenting out such treatments than Char was.

“I thought he was being… inappropriate.” Char continued, not entirely sure if he was speaking to himself or Caroline.

She gave him a dismissive wave and stroked hair back from Johann’s forehead. “Are you sure about the clinic?” She asked him gently and Johann nodded jerkily.

Caroline winced and looked back up at Char. “I’ll have to close the market, will you stay with him while I get everything closed down?”

Char nodded, and then looked down at Johann, shaking and in need. His own pulse picked up and the scent of the omega’s arousal hit him in a different, more welcoming, way than it had before.

“I’ll take him. I can take him home.” Char told Caroline.

She eyed him for a moment before giving him a curt nod. “He lives in the apartment above the medical practice. Do you know wh-”

Caroline stopped as Char nodded and moved beside her. He began to ease Johann into his arms and pull him from the floor. His mouth watering at the touch of flesh on flesh.

*

Johann woke in a soft, comfortable bed.

It wasn’t that his own bed was uncomfortable, but this was clearly not his bed. It was more like sleeping on a cloud.

Everything smelled fresh and clean. The air crisp and a slight cool breeze blew from an open window somewhere.

Johann blinked his eyes open, exhausted and hazy, he had no idea where he was.

“Hello?” Johann croaked, his throat dry.

He heard a scramble of movement then, so fast and sudden that it put him on guard. He sat quickly to find himself almost entirely swamped by fluffy pillows in something that was almost a nest. The room wasn’t too bright, the curtains only open slightly, but the walls were so white, as was all the furniture, that it was startling.

He looked down at the white bedding, white pillows, soft white blankets. And he was wearing his white shirt and - he checked under the sheets and was relieved to find he was wearing his underwear also.

Then, in the whiteness, moving quickly towards him was Char.

When their eyes met, Char stopped. He looked slightly rumbled, only half awake. Johann looked past him to see that there was a very modern, white armchair in the corner of the room, a pale blue blanket covering part of it.

“What’s going on?” Johann asked. At the rasp in his voice Char detoured to a side table and grabbed a bottle of water, unscrewing the cap almost the whole way off before handing it to Johann.

Johann took it and pulled off the cap, drinking half of it down whilst Char continued to observe him with no little concern.

“Um, this is my apartment. Well, um, penthouse. You’re in my guest room.” Char’s cheeks reddened.

“Why am I in your guest room?” Johann frowned, trying to remember the last thing he could, but coming up blank beyond a vague memory of being at the market office. He frowned, feeling slightly unsettled, regardless of how comfortable the room was.

“I told Caroline I’d get you home, but… It felt like taking you to your apartment... it would, I’d feel like I was intruding.”

“So you kidnapped me instead?” Johann cocked a brow and Char winced. “And, um… what happened then? Between us?” Johann felt slightly sick at the thought of not knowing, but it was clear he must have gone into heat.

“Between…? Oh!” Char held up his hands, his eyes wide. “Oh, no. No, nothing like that. I, um… I brought you here and then I called a heat clinic to see what I should do.”

Char stopped talking, his face so very red.

“And? You took me to a clinic?” Johann asked slowly, still trying to fathom what had happened.

“Um, no. Oh god, this is-” Char cut off his own words and shook his head, “I feel so terrible.”

“Char?” Johann growled, needing the truth.

“You weren’t in heat. It was a false heat, and it was all my fault.” Char said the words quickly and then hid his face behind one hand as he shook his head. His following words were a little muffled as a result. “The flowers.”

“The flowers?” Johann asked, confused and annoyed and feeling a whole host of other emotions he couldn’t even begin to sort through.

“One of the flowers on the cart, turns out it can induce false heat. It’s a bit like catnip, some cats it drives nuts, others it chills out. It doesn’t affect all omegas the same, in fact the doctor I spoke to at the clinic said it only really affects one omega in thousands. And even then, omegas are so unlikely to come into contact with this flower in bloom and-”

“And you’ve had it on your cart, and I kept coming by your cart…” Johann started to piece it all together and felt his own cheeks heat with embarrassment. “I… I behaved so… I was flirting and…”

“Wait. No.” Char interrupted, closing the distance between them and settling on the edge of the bed, leaning in close to the omega. “No, it doesn’t work like that. It can just bring on a false heat. It doesn’t affect thoughts or actions, or… um, feelings.” Char was breathless as he said the last, his eyes flicking from Johann’s eyes to his mouth and back again.

“So it wasn’t the reason I was attracted to you, and wanted to flirt with you?” Johann asked quietly.

“Was?” Char’s face was bright and hopeful.

At which Johann couldn’t help a smile.

“My heat is due though, in the next week. So you can understand why I thought-” Johann started to explain as Char began to crawl towards him on the bed.

“Uhuh,” Char replied softly as he advanced. “Doesn’t explain that I wanted to flirt back, and-” Char leaned in, his lips almost brushing Johann’s.

“Wait!” Johann exclaimed, leaning back a little and fixing Char with a confused look. “Penthouse? You have a penthouse?”

Char’s cheeks started to pink up again and he moved back to sit next to Johann.

“The doctor said you might have some fragmented memories, but they should come back. But I guess I need to tell you-” Char started, looking slightly forlorn.

He had looked that way before. In the office. When he’d-

Johann drew in a sharp breath and put his hand to his mouth, “Oh, you… I remember. Or at least I have some vague memories, like I was drunk. But you told me you… and then I… Oh god!” Johann groaned and dropped his head into his hands.

Had he really tried to give Char a blow job in the office? What if someone had walked in?

“This is all like some bad dream.” Johann groaned.

Then he felt Char’s fingers curl into his and pull them away from his face.

“At first I thought that you were just acting on what I’d told you about being a prince. And then when I thought you were in heat, I thought you were acting on a biological need.” Char said softly, stroking his thumbs over Johann’s hands.

“And now?” Johann asked.

Char smiled but shrugged all the same, “Now, I just hope I haven’t misread it all and made a fool of myself.”

“No,” Johann replied with no little affection, “No you haven’t.”

Johann leaned in as Char did too, their lips meeting in a chaste, soft kiss. They pressed light kisses to each other for a moment.

And then Johann opened to Char and the alpha moved forward. Slow and gentle movements that Johann could refuse if he so wanted. But he didn’t, instead he reclined back into the pillows until Char had climbed over him.

Their kiss was languid and exploratory, though they grew breathless all the same.

Needing air, Johann pulled back, shaking and aching with need. His cock was hard and he could feel Char was also growing against his hip.

“I want to.” Johann found himself confessing. “I want this. Not when… When I’m in heat I won’t know any difference. I need you to know I want you. No matter who, or what you are.”

He was never normally this forward. He had hoped they could perhaps date and then maybe next year’s heat, who knew? But now it all seemed moot. This needed to be now, and Johann couldn’t and wouldn’t resist that.

Char growled at the words and pressed his face into Johann’s neck, breathing his scent in.

“I want this too,” He muttered.

Johann was trembling, panting, as he moved his hands between them and started to unbuckle Char’s belt.

The alpha gasped but then moved back, giving Johann enough room to work and allowing him to take the lead.

Johann swallowed and doubled his efforts, sliding the belt open and then undoing Char’s fly. He could feel the hefty weight of the alpha’s cock even through the fabric and whined with need.

Johann hesitated only a moment before he freed Char's cock and then swallowed.

When Char started to try and push his pants down, Johann stilled him with his hands and shook his head, "No. Like this… I just… I want you. Now."

Char nodded, his cheeks flushed, as he settled between Johann's legs. Johann reached down and pulled his underwear to one side, allowing Char's hard cock to rub against his slick-wet entrance.

The both pulled short gasps as Char slid easily into him.

"Oh my god," Johann muttered, wrapping his arms around Char's neck and settling the alpha against him as Char began to move. "I needed this," Johann muttered. "Need to feel you when I wasn't out of my mind in heat."

Char let out a grunt that ended in a whimper as he began to move more deeply, a little quicker.

"You feel so good," The alpha near sobbed and that pulled a purr from Johann's chest.

They pressed tight to each other, their clothes scrunching up between them. It might have been uncomfortable had either of them been aware of anything other than the slide of their bodies together.

He could already feel Char's knot growing and instinctively pushed back against each thrust to encourage it.

"I won't last long," Char panted in response.

Johann chuckled and continued his actions. "We have all the time in the world for more."

At that Char moaned and began to thrust with more vigor.

Excess pillows began to fall from the bed as Char chased his pleasure, getting ever closer to sinking his knot into the willing omega.

Every movement had Johann near crying out with pleasure. Each thrust took him closer to the edge and then suddenly everything was perfect.

Johann's orgasm exploded through his body as Char sank his knot into him. He'd never come untouched before, and his body was practically convulsing with the aftershocks of it. The way he clenched around Char was beyond anything he could describe, made only the better when he felt Char pulse within him. His knot throbbing as he spilled inside Johann, a physical display of the attraction he felt.

Char trembled as he tried to hold himself up for a moment, but then he collapsed down onto Johann. He wrapped himself around the alpha, sated and delighted.

"I don't usually jump into bed with someone so soon," Char muttered against Johann's throat.

“Hmm,” Johann let out an amused hum as he relaxed into the pillows, enjoying the sensation of being so full and knotted. “Perhaps the flowers affected you after all.”

Char chuckled and shook his head. “Only in the sense that you are one of the few who appreciate my hobby.”

Johann smiled.

But then Char added, “And it’s alright if this is it. If you don’t want the hassle of being the boyfriend of a Prince.”

Char sucked in a breath as Johann began to nuzzle at his mating gland. Arguably as intimate as the sex they’d just had.

“Boyfriend,” Johann agreed, continuing to nuzzle Char. “I can’t claim it isn’t a surprise and something I might need to adjust to. But… it doesn’t change who you are and how I’ve come to feel about you. So, yes. Boyfriend. Maybe one day more.” It wasn’t a question.

“Maybe husband?” Char asked cautiously.

“Yes, your Majesty, maybe so.” Johann grinned and then moved, seeking Char’s mouth once more as they eased into another sensual kiss.

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